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THE FIRST LECTURER ON HISPANIC AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

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LEWIS HANKE



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# THE FIRST LECTURER ON HISPANIC AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

Daniel De Leon, one of the most colorful figures in the history of radicalism in this country, seems to have been the first lecturer in a university in the United States on Hispanic American diplomatic history.<sup>1</sup> The son of a Dutch medical officer, De Leon was born in Curaçao in 1852 and after some secondary school education in Holland and Germany entered Columbia Law School and formed one of a small group of students taught by the late Professor John Burgess at the beginning of his distinguished career at Columbia University. Burgess has described De Leon as a

very peculiar man in many respects, but a remarkably well-informed one. He knew more international law and diplomatic history than any man of his age I have ever met.<sup>2</sup>

After receiving the degree of LL.B. in 1878,<sup>3</sup> De Leon practised law for a time in Texas and returned to Columbia in 1883 to win the first prize lectureship which had been established in 1882 in the new School of Political Science.<sup>4</sup>

The lectureship was to run for three years with an annual value of five hundred dollars. In order to be eligible for appointment the candidate must have been a graduate of Columbia and an active member of the Academy of Political Science, and must have read at least one paper before the Academy of Political Science during the year preceding the appointment. The duty of the lecturer was to deliver annually a series of at least twenty lectures, the result of original investigation, before the students of the School of Political Science.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, in the second half of the academic year, Daniel De Leon, "prize lecturer on South American Diplomacy",<sup>6</sup> delivered a series

<sup>1</sup> Most of the biographical information concerning De Leon come from a first-rate article by W. J. Ghent in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, V. 222-224.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Burgess, *Reminiscences of an American Scholar* (New York, 1934), p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> In the college handbooks De Leon is listed as also possessing the Ph.D. degree, but according to a letter to the writer from the Registrar of Columbia University he received only an LL.B. from Columbia.

<sup>4</sup> *Annual Report of the President of Columbia College* (1884), p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Handbook of Information, Columbia College* (1884), p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* (1884), p. x.

of twenty lectures which was described as follows:

*South American Diplomacy.*—This course of lectures embraces the history of the relations of Spain and Portugal to America during the colonial period, and the history of the diplomatic relations between the Empire of Brazil and its republican neighbors, down to our own time. The course closes with the new relations established between these States (and especially between the Platine States) after the war against Paraguay, 1865-1870.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Handbook* for the next year, 1885, De Leon is entitled "Lecturer on Latin-American diplomacy"<sup>8</sup> and the following announcement shows what an interesting group of lectures he provided for the students in the School of Political Science:

*Latin-American Diplomacy.*—The object of this course is to give a knowledge of the leading questions of international law that have arisen in Latin America, of their historical development, and of the attitude taken in reference to these questions by the government of the United States. The course embraces:

I. The history of the diplomacy of Spain and Portugal with respect to America, during the colonial period; and the history of the diplomatic relations between the empire of Brazil and its republican neighbors down to our own time. The course closes with the new relations established between these states after the war against Paraguay, 1865-1870.

## II. European interventions in Latin America.

- a. The forcible occupation by Great Britain of the Malvinas (Falkland Islands), 1833.
- b. The French intervention in La Plata, 1838-40.
- c. The French intervention in Mexico, 1838.
- d. The British intervention in Central America.
- e. The joint intervention of France and England in La Plata, 1845-50.
- f. The Spanish intervention in St. Domingo, 1861.
- g. The joint intervention of England, France, and Spain in Mexico, 1861.
- h. The Spanish intervention in the South Pacific, 1864.<sup>9</sup>

De Leon delivered lectures according to the above program during the last year of his three-year lectureship (1883-1886) and during the second three-year term to which he was appointed in 1886. According to W. J. Ghent, De Leon's partisans have always asserted that "his retirement from the college was forced by his radical activities but the statement has been denied by competent authority".<sup>10</sup>

In any case, it would seem that De Leon did not do much to encourage the study of Hispanic American diplomacy at Columbia. During the whole of his six-year term as lecturer, he seems to have

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* (1884), p. 203.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (1885), p. xiii.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* (1885), p. 206.

<sup>10</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, V. 223.

Gift of L. G. Wende

attracted no advanced students to the field and he published nothing on Hispanic American diplomatic questions except an eight-page political tract issued in 1884 "to business men" by the National Committee of Republicans and Independents, entitled *A specimen of Mr. Blaine's diplomacy: is he a safe man to trust as president?* In this pamphlet De Leon severely criticized Blaine's support of the Calderón government in Peru and exulted that the 1882 Blaine proposal for an American Congress had failed, because

had this foundation been laid, the doors would have been flung open for eternal foreign complications; our policy of peace would have become a thing of the past; at every moment we would have been called in by the underdog in each of those countries, and WE WOULD HAVE INVITED OURSELVES TO BECOME PARTIES IN ALL COMMOTIONS IN PERU, THE SAME AS GREAT BRITAIN HAS DONE IN THE EAST INDIES!<sup>11</sup>

The elder statesmen of the School of Political Science faculty may have felt that Hispanic American diplomacy was too esoteric a subject to have as a permanent part of their curriculum or De Leon's growing interest in practical labor questions may have won out over his scholarly inclinations. In 1886, he actively supported the candidacy of Henry George for mayor of New York City and in 1888 joined the Knights of Labor. Thereafter, he enjoyed a prominent position in radical circles though never great influence because of personal peculiarities, but he did work out in his writings the concept of a revolutionary working-class organization formed by industries instead of crafts which Lenin accepted later as a picture of the ultimate form of government in Communist Russia.<sup>12</sup> Whatever may be the true reason for De Leon's retirement from the lectureship in 1889, the study of Hispanic American history at Columbia languished until William R. Shepherd offered a course in the "History of Spanish America" in 1904.<sup>13</sup>

LEWIS HANKE.

Harvard University.

<sup>11</sup> On page 8 of the tract. De Leon also published during the lectureship period an article on "The conference at Berlin on the West African question" in the *Political Science Quarterly* (I. 103-139) and a couple of book reviews in the same journal (I. 346-347; IV. 195-196).

<sup>12</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, V. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Shepherd had been a prize lecturer in 1896-1899 but apparently did not lecture on Spanish America until 1904 (*Catalogue of Columbia University for 1904-1905*, p. 121).



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